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ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00
	FBIE-00	UTED-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01
	VCE-00	NSAE-00	OIC-02	SS-00	TEST-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00
	DRL-02	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/005W			

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FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5979
INFO AMEMBASSY HANOI
USMISSION GENEVA
ASEAN COLLECTIVE
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HO CHI MINH CITY 000131

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV, PRM, DRL/IRF, AND
EAP/PD/MSPEER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM KIRF](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [VM](#) [CB](#) [ETMIN](#) [HUMANR](#) [RELFREE](#)
SUBJECT: "DEGA PROTESTANTISM" AND THE U.S. CONNECTION

REF: A. (01) HCMC 1134 B. (01) HCMC 1079

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: AN ETHNIC MINORITY LEADER FROM GIA
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LAI PROVINCE RECENTLY DESCRIBED TO POLOFF A COMPLEX WEB
OF SHIFTING LOCAL ALLIANCES AMONG THE ETHNIC GROUPS IN
VIETNAM'S CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. MIXING RELIGION WITH
POLITICS, IT INCLUDES STRONG CONNECTIONS TO ETHNIC
MINORITY EXILES IN THE U.S. ANOTHER ETHNIC MINORITY
LEADER FROM DAK LAK PROVINCE SAID THAT DIFFERENCES OF
OPINION CONCERNING MINORITY PERSONS FROM THE CENTRAL
HIGHLANDS SEEKING REFUGE IN CAMBODIA HAS MADE THE SPLIT
BETWEEN THE "DEGA PROTESTANTS" AND MAINSTREAM
PROTESTANTS IN THE AREA MORE RANCOROUS. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) THE ETHNIC MINORITY LEADER FROM GIA LAI
PROVINCE ESTIMATED 30 PERCENT OF ETHNIC MINORITY PEOPLE
("MONTAGNARDS") IN GIA LAI PROVINCE SUPPORT THE NOTION
OF AN AUTONOMOUS "DEGA (ETHNIC MINORITY) STATE" IN THE
CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. AMONG THIS 30 PERCENT, HOWEVER,
THERE ARE SERIOUS DIVISIONS.

3. (SBU) WHAT THE ETHNIC MINORITY LEADER TERMED "THE
POLITICAL GROUP" IS LARGELY SUPPORTIVE OF KOK K'SOR,
CURRENTLY RESIDING IN SOUTH CAROLINA. KOK K'SOR
PROCLAIMED HIMSELF PRESIDENT-IN-EXILE OF AN INDEPENDENT
DEGA STATE IN SEPTEMBER 2000. WHAT THE ETHNIC MINORITY
LEADER TERMED "THE RELIGIOUS GROUP" SUPPORTS K'SOR,
INsofar AS HE PROMOTES PROTESTANTISM AS THE DEGA STATE
RELIGION. A THIRD GROUP, WHICH HE SAID IS NEITHER
POLITICAL NOR RELIGIOUS, IS COMPOSED OF "OPPORTUNISTS"
WHO USE PROMISES OF DEGA AUTONOMY OR INDEPENDENCE TO
BUILD THEIR PERSONAL FIEFDOMS. THIS THIRD GROUP WOULD
BE UNIMPORTANT, ACCORDING TO THE ETHNIC MINORITY
LEADER, EXCEPT THAT THEY PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN
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PERSUADING PEOPLE TO DEPART VIETNAM FOR UNHCR CAMPS IN
CAMBODIA -- OFTEN PROMISING RESETTLEMENT TO THE U.S.

4. (SBU) THE ETHNIC MINORITY LEADER CONFIRMED THAT THE
TOP ORGANIZER OF THE "POLITICAL GROUP" WAS A PERSON
NAMED JANA YBONR (ALSO KNOWN AS BOME) WHO WAS CONVICTED
OF DESTABILIZING PUBLIC SECURITY AND SENTENCED TO 12
YEARS' IMPRISONMENT IN SEPTEMBER (SEE REFTELS). HE
SAID SEVEN PERSONS STILL FORM THE CORE LEADERSHIP OF
THE POLITICAL GROUP, AND THAT ALL SEVEN STILL RESIDE
IN VIETNAM. THE CURRENT HEAD OF THE GROUP IS A WOMAN
NAMED H'JIP (ALSO KNOWN AS AMI SARA). HE SAID SHE
RESIDES IN PHU NHUON DISTRICT OF GIA LAI PROVINCE, BUT
RECENTLY WENT INTO HIDING IN DAK LAK PROVINCE AND IS A
FUGITIVE FROM VIETNAMESE POLICE. (NOTE: THE ETHNIC
MINORITY LEADER EXPLAINED THAT AMONG THE EDE AND GIA
RAI MINORITY GROUPS, ADULTS USUALLY CARRY AT LEAST TWO
NAMES - THEIR BIRTH-NAME AND THE NAME THEY ACQUIRE UPON

THE BIRTH OF THEIR FIRST CHILD. FOR EXAMPLE, AMI SARA MEANS "MOTHER OF SARA," AND AMA CHAM MEANS "FATHER OF CHAM." END NOTE.)

15. (SBU) THE HEAD OF THE "RELIGIOUS GROUP," ACCORDING TO THE ETHNIC MINORITY LEADER, IS AMA CHAM, WHO CURRENTLY RESIDES AT ONE OF THE UNHCR CAMPS IN CAMBODIA. THE MINORITY LEADER SAID THAT MOST OF THE ORGANIZERS OF THE RELIGIOUS GROUP HAVE GONE TO CAMBODIA. HE SAID THIS GROUP OF "DEGA PROTESTANTS" SPLIT FROM THE MAINSTREAM PROTESTANTS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS (WHO MOSTLY FOLLOW MISSIONARIES AND PASTORS OF THE CHRISTIAN AND MISSIONARY ALLIANCE OR CMA) TO
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SUPPORT AN INDEPENDENT DEGA STATE LED BY KOK K'SOR. RECENTLY, HOWEVER, THE POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS "ARGUE AND FIGHT AMONG THEMSELVES." THE DEGA PROTESTANTS INSIST THAT PROTESTANTISM MUST BE THE STATE RELIGION, AND ALL CITIZENS OF A DEGA STATE MUST BE PROTESTANT, ACCORDING TO THIS ETHNIC MINORITY LEADER. MEANWHILE, THE POLITICAL GROUP WANTS AND NEEDS A BROADER BASE OF SUPPORT.

16. (SBU) THE ETHNIC MINORITY LEADER SAID THAT SIMILAR DIVISIONS EXIST WITHIN THE MONTAGNARD COMMUNITY IN THE UNITED STATES. THERE ARE THOSE WHO SUPPORT AN INDEPENDENT DEGA STATE, AND THERE ARE THOSE WHO DESIRE ONLY TO ADVOCATE FOR BETTER TREATMENT OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN VIETNAM. AMONG THOSE WHO SUPPORT AN INDEPENDENT STATE ARE BOTH THOSE WHO ACCEPT KOK K'SOR AS HEAD OF A GOVERNMENT-IN-EXILE AND THOSE WHO REJECT HIM. AMONG K'SOR SUPPORTERS ARE THOSE WHO SEEK BROAD-BASED SUPPORT AND THOSE WHO SEEK PARTICIPATION LIMITED ONLY TO BAPTIZED PROTESTANTS. (NOTE: THE LEADER SAID HE IS AWARE OF THESE DIVISIONS WITHIN THE U.S.-BASED COMMUNITY THROUGH FREQUENT PHONE CONVERSATIONS WITH RELATIVES IN THE U.S. END NOTE.)

17. (SBU) ANOTHER ETHNIC MINORITY LEADER FROM DAK LAK
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PROVINCE TOLD POLOFF THAT SINCE THE GVN RECOGNIZED THE SOUTHERN EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF VIETNAM IN APRIL 2001, PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES HAVE SOUGHT OUT MAINSTREAM PROTESTANT PASTORS TO HELP MAINTAIN ORDER WITHIN THE ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES. THIS ETHNIC MINORITY LEADER, WHO IS HIMSELF AN ORDAINED PROTESTANT PASTOR, SAID THAT MAINSTREAM PASTORS ARE WILLING TO COOPERATE WITH THE GOVERNMENT. THEY TELL THEIR CONGREGATIONS NOT TO RUN TO CAMBODIA. IN CONTRAST, DEGA PASTORS EXHORT THEIR FOLLOWERS TO CROSS THE BORDER TO UNHCR CAMPS. THE SPLIT BETWEEN DEGA PROTESTANTS AND MAINSTREAM PROTESTANTS HAS BECOME MORE ACRIMONIOUS OVER THIS ISSUE, HE ASSERTED.

18. (SBU) COMMENT: ANY MOVES TOWARD AN INDEPENDENT DEGA STATE IN VIETNAM'S CENTRAL HIGHLANDS WOULD BE STRONGLY RESISTED BY THE GVN. IN NUMEROUS PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS, VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF STABILITY AND UNITY. THE SEVERAL MINORITY LEADERS WE HAVE SPOKEN TO ALL WANT BETTER TREATMENT FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES IN VIETNAM. BUT WHEN RELIGION MIXES WITH "SEPARATIST" POLITICAL GOALS, THE GVN SEES ONLY THE PROBLEM OF ENSURING STABILITY AND POLITICAL UNITY -- NOT A QUESTION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF.
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